

He said later he felt the company commander, who said he was going to get reinforcements, had abandoned his group of men. "It made me all the more determined to accomplish our mission," he told the PBS series "American Valor." "Because at that time the Army was segregated. It was thought that we were unable to fight."

No black soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor during World War II, although Baker did receive the Purple Heart, a Bronze Star and Distinguished Service Cross.

In 1993, U.S. Army officials contracted Shaw University in Raleigh, N.C., to determine if there was a racial disparity in the way Medal of Honor recipients were selected. The university researchers found that there was, and recommended 10 soldiers to receive it. From that list, Pentagon officials picked seven.

But there was one problem—the statutory limit for presentation had expired. Congress was required to pass legislation that allowed the president to award the Medals of Honor so long after the action.

Baker was the only recipient still living; the other six soldiers received their awards posthumously, with their medals being presented to family members.

Baker was initially rebuffed when he tried to join the Army. Baker said in an interview with public television that a recruiter told him that there was no quota for enlisting "you people."

Reflecting on life in a segregated Army unit, he told *The Washington Post*, "I was an angry young man. We were all angry. But we had a job to do, and we did it." He added, though, that he "knew things would get better, and I'm glad to say that I'm here to see it."

Baker returned to his northern Idaho home after the war. When he received a call telling him he was to receive a Medal of Honor, at first he was astonished. Then he was angry.

"It was something that I felt should have been done a long time ago," he told Idaho public television. "If I was worthy of receiving the Medal of Honor in 1945, I should have received it then."

Baker called his 1997 memoir "Lasting Valor."

U.S. Rep. Walt Minnick said he met Vernon Baker in the 1990s when the soldier spoke at a College of Idaho event. Minnick said he'd been expecting a tough, battle-hardened soldier, but says he was instead struck by Baker's gentle demeanor. Minnick said Baker's valor on the battlefield in Italy was a rebuke of racist policies that dominated the U.S. military into the middle of the last century.

"His actions on the front line demonstrates better than words can describe why discrimination and segregation in the military was both unfair and absolutely inconsistent with an effective fighting force," Minnick said. "He demonstrated a degree of courage few people have. He was prepared to give his life for his country—a country in which he was considered a second-class citizen."

Baker was born in 1919 in Wyoming. Orphaned as a small child, he was raised by his grandparents in Cheyenne. He was working as a railroad porter when he decided to join the Army in mid-1941, a few months before Pearl Harbor.

In 2004, Baker underwent emergency surgery to remove a malignant brain tumor. Before he fell ill, he had failed to sign up for benefits from Veterans Affairs and Medicare, not realizing what the requirements were. Community members and politicians in Idaho pitched in to help him get aid for his unpaid medical bills.

Hodge said Baker continued to battle brain cancer over the next years, and he recently

began receiving hospice care at his home. Baker was surrounded by his family when he died Tuesday evening.

Hodge said Baker's wife, Heidi Baker, plans to have a memorial service in St. Maries but the arrangements have not yet been made. He said Heidi Baker also planned to talk with military officials about possibly having Baker buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

A war hero, Baker was also a man of peace. After receiving the award, he told a newspaper reporter for the *Moscow-Pullman Daily News*: "I hope never to see someone else having the Medal of Honor hung around his neck by the president of the United States. You young people coming up, please don't take war as a solution to a problem. God gave you the brains to think and not to use violence as a means to an end."

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

GANN VALLEY, SOUTH DAKOTA

• Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, today I pay tribute to the 125th anniversary of the population center of our State, Gann Valley. This community, just 15 minutes away from the Missouri River, is the county seat of Buffalo County.

Gann Valley was named after Herst Gann, one of the area's pioneers as well as the publisher of one of two local newspapers. Gann also donated the courthouse when the town was founded on January 14, 1885. Since the railroad never came through, a freight line made three trips a week to neighboring Kimball to bring in goods for the town and ship out the products from the town's creamery.

Gann Valley will spend Saturday, July 31, celebrating this historic milestone. A wagon train will arrive in the morning to kick off the festivities, followed by a parade, games, a dance, and more. Small towns like Gann Valley are the backbone of South Dakota, and I am proud to recognize the people who live in and around this great community.●

TIMBER LAKE, SOUTH DAKOTA

• Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, today I pay tribute to the 100th anniversary of Timber Lake, SD, on the Cheyenne River Sioux Indian Reservation. The county seat of Dewey County, this small town embodies South Dakota values.

Originally established by the Secretary of the Interior, the land plots were so popular that 1,000 people camped out when the land went on sale. The town grew quickly with many "tent stores" springing up. Settlers arrived before the railroad did, so building materials were brought in by wagon. The Milwaukee Railroad quickly realized the demand for a railroad through Timber Lake, and by May, trains were reaching the thriving new town. Timber Lake officially incorporated in February 1911. The census in 1920 showed a population of 555, making it officially a city of the second class.

In the early 1920s, sewer lines were laid for a town septic system. The

digging machine unearthed a metal object, which was put in the bank. Upon further examination, and after it was cleaned, it was determined to be a sculpture of two hands clasping a rose branch with a snake winding through the hands. The origin of this unexpected find is still unknown.

To honor its 100 year anniversary, the Timber Lake community is having a "Days of 1910" celebration, complete with a banquet, a talent show and play, and a viewing of 4-H exhibits. I am proud to recognize them on their historic milestone, and I look forward to seeing what else this great town accomplishes.●

TRIBUTE TO SONYA DAMSKER LEFKOVITS

• Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, today I wish to pay tribute to Sonya Damsker Lefkovits, who is being honored by the Columbiana Chamber of Commerce for her dedication and service to her community.

Sonya was born May 6, 1923, in Memphis, TN, to Louis and Helen Richberger Damsker. Raised in Tyler, TX, Sonya graduated from Tyler High School and went on to attend Louisiana State University, where she earned a degree in public school music. Following her graduation at LSU, Sonya moved to Birmingham to work at the Jewish Welfare Board as its first activities director. It was there that she met her future husband, Norman Leo Lefkovits.

In July, 1947, Sonya married Norman Leo Lefkovits, and she moved to Columbiana to operate the Lefkovits family mercantile store, *The Columbiana Leader*. Since arriving in Columbiana, AL, nearly 63 years ago, Sonya has been an integral member of her community. In 1949, she became a charter member of the Vignette Club, which gave her the opportunity to participate in various community projects. Among her proudest achievements was working on the building committee during the construction of the Columbia Library when she was chairman of the Columbiana Library Board.

Sonya has also held various community leadership positions. She was a member of the Shelby County High School Band Boosters Club, the women's coordinator for the Columbiana Civil Defense Organization, and co-chairman of the Shelby County Civil War Centennial Commemoration. Sonya was an active member of the Shelby County Historical Society. In 1999, Sonya helped to form the Columbiana Merchants and Professional Association, where she worked on the Columbiana Downtown Renovation Committee. She also served as an ambassador to the South Shelby Chamber of Commerce.

Sonya has two children, Norman Leo Lefkovits, Jr. and Marsha Phyllis Lefkovits, both of whom now reside in California. In the early 1980s, Marsha